

# A letter from a Canadian telecom worker on the unions

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*The World Socialist Web Site received the following letter from a Canadian telecommunications worker in response to “Canada: How to fight the CAW’s backroom deals,” published September 9, 2010.*

Sweetheart and backroom CAW deals aren’t restricted to automotive workers. At the telecom company where I used to work for over 20 years before being laid off, the CAW local facilitated the destruction of 70 percent of the unionized jobs. Over 18 years 1,100 layoffs took place leaving less than 500 today, and the CAW didn’t save one. Oh, they’d thump their chests and bleat but in the end nothing all they did was administer the layoffs and demoralize the workers. In fact the ever-weakening collective agreement and its virtually carte blanche contracting out language made it easy for the company.

Over the three years since I lost my job the CAW local has done worse than nothing to help me and my family. They deliberately undermined any hopes of my getting back to work, saying in an email exchange with the director of human resources that due to “certain issues” the company has with me and another co-worker (and friend). And for other unstated “different reasons” the outlook for our return is bleak. Those issues likely include our personal efforts to save our jobs which went far beyond anything the spineless CAW did, including the embarrassment of corporate officials which forced a six month deferral of our layoffs.

Despite rank and file opposition the CAW rammed through a two-tiered pay structure using tried and true fear tactics, threatening the workers with the collapse of the company if they didn’t capitulate. The result is the

division of the membership and the pitting of older worker against younger. More recently the union negotiated a new unionized classification that’s immune to layoff, further dividing the membership. And because the protected positions are filled not by seniority but by a sham company testing process with no union oversight or participation, the company cherry-picks its golden boys to fill the positions. Worse yet, the CAW and the company negotiated a backroom deal that strips the right to arbitration away from any union member that grieves any issue related to the protected positions. When challenged on this, the union president says that such agreements are “common” and “not unique,” as if somehow that excuses such treachery. And if they are “common,” then how many other betrayals have been negotiated behind closed doors?

This is the sort of “representation” we get for our union dues, well over half of which goes to a corrupt CAW national office whose officers pull in 6 figure incomes.

The CAW is morally bankrupt and in bed with corporate power. It must be swept away and replaced with new democratically controlled organizations.

Doug H

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